

Voices in the wilderness

There's a lot of dishonesty out there in terms of gay people fooling themselves about what they really want and straight people being fooled about gay life. One myth floating around is that people accept as truth that all gay men have AIDS and all gay life is a tragedy and all we do as gay men is either sit around waiting to die or weep over our friends who are dying."

— David Leavitt's latest novel,

Equal Affections, is the number one best seller among gay men across the country (The Washington Blade, February 24, 1989)

Isn't a virus that for centuries has deprived us gay men and lesbians of our freedom, nor is it this epidemic that now most destroys our lives. Nor is it bigotry. It's our own shame, a morbid failure of self-respect and sane, self-righteous anger. If we care about nothing but AIDS now, it is because identifying with sexually transmitted death plays to some dark belief that we deserve it."

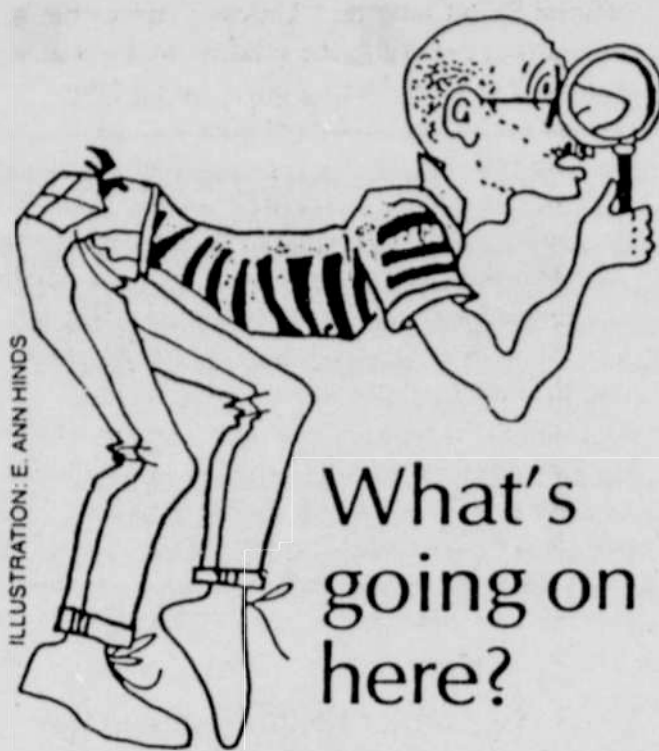
— Darrell Yates Rist, *The Deadly Costs of an Obsession* (The Nation, February 13, 1989)

Cotton Mather [1663-1728] called syphilis a punishment "which the Just Judgment of God has reserved for our Late Ages." Recalling this and other nonsense uttered about syphilis from the end of the fifteenth to early twentieth centuries, one should hardly be surprised that many want to view AIDS metaphorically — as, plague-like, a moral judgment on society."

— Susan Sontag's *AIDS and Its Metaphors* is published by Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Gaybashing top news, but not in *The Oregonian*

A gaybashing in Medford was front page news for almost a week in the *Medford Mail Tribune*. The incident was also top of the



B Y J A Y B R O W N

news on some Portland television and radio stations. *The Oregonian*, however, gave the assault less than six inches on an inside page in the Metro section and made no mention that the assault victim had been harassed and beaten because of his sexual orientation. The gist of *The Oregonian* report is clear from the headline "Medford alerted to supremacists."

Christopher Drew Bostwick, an alleged "skinhead," had been harassing the victim for about a week because of his homosexuality and had threatened to kill him, according to reports in the *Medford Mail Tribune*. On March 14, Bostwick and Laura Jean Dailey assaulted the victim with a tree limb and a metal bar. The victim required six stitches to a cut near his left eye, and was cut and bruised on the left side of his head.

Bostwick and Dailey have been charged with second-degree assault and remain in jail at this writing. Bail for Bostwick and Dailey was set at \$10,000 each.

The final irony is that while this incident was being reported daily in Southern Oregon, political maneuvering in the Oregon Legislature killed attempts to add "sexual orientation" to existing law regarding intimidation and harassment.

Gays united against the Health Division?

The state Health Division's new HIV public education campaign contains "nothing of value," according to Jim Clay, Willamette AIDS Council's director of youth programs. Clay said that the materials prepared for the Oregon Health Division by Turtledove Clemens, Inc. of Portland, at a cost of about \$70,000 is another example of wasted public funds.

"People United Against AIDS" the materials say, but Clay reports that the Eugene-based Community AIDS Consortium consisting of about 25 AIDS service organizations in Lane County wants to have nothing to do with the materials.

The revolt against the campaign is not happening only in Lane County, however. When the campaign was unveiled in Portland last month, it was attacked by the Cascade AIDS Project's Tom Koberstein and ACT UP's Michael Petrelis, who together represent an extremely wide spectrum of the gay community.

Taxing news

The Pentagon spent \$336 million in ferreting out homosexual conduct in the military in 1983, according to *The Progressive Magazine*.

The Navy leads the armed forces in moving against alleged homosexuals. In 1987, 773 were discharged, compared to 335 by the Army and 282 by the Air Force. Naval investigators give women Marines the closest scrutiny. From 1982 through 1987, 447 men and 213 women were ousted from the Marines for homosexuality. Since women constitute only five percent of Marine Corps strength, Pentagon statistics indicate women are eight times as likely as men to be discharged for homosexuality.

Phone sex is safe sex

National Gay Rights Advocates filed an *amicus curiae* brief in the U.S. Supreme Court in a case which could have an important impact on the fight against AIDS. The brief was filed on behalf of the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. The case, *Sable Communications v. F.C.C.*, challenges a 1988 Act of Congress which bans "Dial-A-Porn" over interstate phone lines. Under current Supreme Court doctrine the government may ban sexually explicit information as obscene if it appeals to a sexual interest, is "patently offensive" and is "lacking in serious value."

"In the age of AIDS, sexually explicit communications cannot simply be dismissed as obscene," argues attorney Benjamin Schatz,

Director of NGRA's AIDS Civil Rights Project. "Quite simply, 'Dial-A-Porn' can save lives by providing an alternative to unsafe sex. Whether people like it or not, it has important social value, and is entitled to constitutional protection."

Chuck Frutche, Assistant Education Director for the San Francisco AIDS Foundation, commented: "The Foundation has conducted safe sex workshops for gay and bisexual men for three years now. Participants have named phone sex as a positive form of safe sex in every recorded session. This shows that phone sex is in fact an important safe sex outlet for many people."

— National Gay Rights Advocates

Helms kills federal AZT subsidy bill as states run out of funds

Senator Jesse Helms (R-NC) today killed legislation that would have extended by six months the federal government's funding program for AZT (Retrovir) for low-income individuals. The move comes as two states — Georgia and Kansas — have exhausted their AZT grants, with funding in several more states expected to expire in the upcoming weeks.

Approximately 7,000 people in the US are receiving government assistance under the AZT subsidy program. AZT — which costs about \$8,000 a year at full dose — is the only government-approved drug for fighting AIDS directly.

The bill would not have allocated additional funds for AZT, but would have given the government time to reprogram already existing funds into federal AZT subsidies. For example, funds from states with surplus money could be moved into states whose funds have expired, or additional monies could be located within the Public Health Service to subsidize AZT.

Majority Leader George Mitchell (D-Maine), who schedules legislation in the Senate, had stipulated the bill would be brought onto the floor only if Senators could agree not to add amendments or to set a time limit for debate of amendments.

Helms, along with Senators William Armstrong (R-Colo.) and Don Nickles (R-Okla.), refused to agree to the stipulations, thus preventing the bill from being considered by the Senate.

Last September, Congress authorized \$15 million to continue the program until March 31, 1989. The new bill would have extended the subsidy program through September 30, 1989. The program was originally created in spring of 1987 when AZT was first licensed. Congress has adjourned for two weeks and will not reconvene until April 4, after the program has ended.

The legislation was introduced into the Senate by Ted Kennedy (D-Mass.), who rallied wide-spread, bi-partisan support for the bill. Reports indicated the Department of Health and Human Services had endorsed continuation of the program.

— Human Rights Campaign Fund •



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